

FIRST LESSON: Isaiah 49:1-7
SECOND LESSON: John 1:29-42
January 15, 2023

“Hanging Out with God”

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John the Baptist was well-known. He was viewed by many as a prophet in the Old Testament tradition. He wore unusual clothes and lived in the desert regions. Baptism was not the only thing John did. John preached a fiery message of repentance. In John’s world final judgment was at hand. John’s message terrified people into changing their lives. He saw the problems of the world as so severe that the only solution was to destroy everything and start over. He believed God’s final judgment was about to take place at any moment. People who were spiritually hungry came to John. People who were aware that something in their lives was missing came to John. And it is here with John the Baptist that we find one of the first disciples, Andrew, brother of Simon Peter.

We don’t know how long Andrew had been coming out to hear John preach, but according to this text he was a disciple of John. This encounter between Jesus and Andrew and then Jesus and Simon Peter is very different from the call stories in the other three gospels. In Matthew and Mark, Jesus is walking beside the Sea of Galilee when he sees two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew casting their net. Jesus says, “Come, follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.” They leave their nets and follow him. James and John are encountered next and also called to follow. Luke’s gospel gives more detail putting everything into the context of Jesus preaching and the enormous catch of fish that followed. But none of these gospels make sense of why these men would leave everything to follow a complete stranger. I remember even as a child thinking how bizarre this was. I was told to never go off with strangers. Why on earth would these adult men just suddenly out of the blue jump up, abandon everything, and follow Jesus? And, it was explained to me by dear Miss Havelock my Sunday School teacher, that this was because it was a miraculous encounter. But in point of fact Jesus **wasn’t** a complete stranger. We have a record here of Simon Peter and Andrew meeting with Jesus and spending time with him. It is quite likely some of the others did too. In fact, given human nature, we can almost certainly say that the first disciples knew who Jesus was and had heard what he had to say before he called them away from their fishing nets and other occupations.

Andrew was a disciple of John. We know that he was because it plainly states that he was one of two of John’s disciples who were with John when he

pointed out Jesus, walking and said, "Look, the Lamb of God!" These two men, Andrew and the other man, then followed Jesus. But what does it mean to say that Jesus is "the lamb of God?" As many images of lambs as there are in the Old Testament, there is no single one we can point to in order to understand exactly what John meant. Andrew and the other disciple were probably very curious as to the meaning. It wasn't an obvious title. It wasn't, "Look, there's the Messiah" or "the Son of Man" or "the Son of God." The most likely connection is the Passover lamb whose blood saved the Israelites as the angel of death passed over their homes. (Exodus 12) But John refers to Jesus as "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The significant difference here is that in the case of the Passover lamb only the Hebrews were spared, and they were saved not from sin but from the angel of death sent to the Egyptians in order to convince Pharaoh to let the people go. John's gospel says the deliverance is from sin, and those being delivered include everyone. John uses the word "cosmos" which means the entire world or universe.

Jesus, "the lamb of God," however we interpret it, quickly realized he was being followed and turned around. He asked the two men, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi, where are you staying?"

"Come," Jesus replied, "and you will see."

This was a bit more than asking where Jesus lived. Because Jesus was a rabbi it was also asking where he taught. But the word for "staying", *meno* in Greek, can be used in many different ways. Much is often made of this word that is translated variously as "stay," "remain" or "abide." It is a favorite term in John's gospel. But while some theologians really like to go to town with all the deep spiritual meanings, I rather like another descriptive phrase used to translate what was going on. Put simply, the two men went **to hang out** with Jesus. It was 4:00 in the afternoon, late in the day. Work was done. They went to his place and **they hung out**. Andrew and this man spent the rest of the day with Jesus, talking, no doubt eating and generally getting to know one another.

Now here's the interesting point that normally slips right past us. Andrew was so impressed he went running back to tell his brother Simon Peter. He told him, "We have found the Messiah!" He brought him to Jesus. But we never hear about the other man again. Two men, both encounter Jesus. Both spend considerable time with Jesus. One commits his life to follow him, and the other walks away, probably back to what he knew before, what was familiar, in this case probably back to following John.

We don't know how long the conversation was when Andrew brought Peter to Jesus the next day. We only know it was life changing. Jesus looked at Peter and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter). It means rock. From this point on in the story we don't hear too much about Andrew and his accomplishments. But we all know who Peter is. All because they went to hang out with Jesus.

I'm not sure about the rest of you, but I'm not good at "hanging out" anymore. I feel guilty if I'm not being productive in some way. My mother is worse than me. One of the hardest things for her to adjust to as she has gotten older is not being able to clean the house and host a million people at the drop of a hat. Moving into assisted living has been a shock. My mother has never

been good at sitting still. Only old age has slowed her down. And even if most people don't have the same level of compulsion my mother does, most of us do get lured into the same trap. We have become extremely focused as a society on being productive. Everything in our life has to be measured. Everything is by the numbers. Our self-worth and our worth as employees are measured by how much we achieve. Remote workers now have to beware because their work is being tracked online by their employers. Jobs with visible outcomes are valued. We are driven every day to justify our existence by what we do. This is not a restful way to live! And it is really destructive when it comes to our spiritual well-being.

Our society doesn't give us much room for spending time with God. It doesn't consider it worthwhile. As a result, while we often get too busy as adults to hang out with people, we REALLY get too busy to hang out with God. Spend time in prayer? Read the bible? Meditate? *What lazy and self-indulgent behavior!* The house is still dirty and the boss is breathing down our neck. But "hanging out" with our friends and with God is *essential* to our well-being. Life is not one big long "to do" list no matter what we have been told.

Some of us have had teenagers. ALL of us have been teenagers. **Teenagers** have "hanging out" down to an art form. We ask where they are going. They answer—to hang out with friends. And what does this "hanging out" consist of? Talking inside or outside. Sometimes eating and drinking. Sometimes walking from one place to another. Getting to know each other. Sharing stories. Sharing a laugh. That is what Andrew, the unnamed man and Peter did. Admittedly they would have done so with great respect. They would have wanted to hear Jesus, to hear his stories and his thoughts. But it was a conversation, not a lecture. This was an intimate encounter, comfortable and personal. And this is the kind of relationship God wants to have with us. Not formal and stilted, but close and personal.

The early disciples had an advantage over us. They could be physically present with Jesus. But we can still be in Jesus' presence by the power of the Holy Spirit. We can hang out with God. And we can refuse to feel guilty for doing it, because what society values and what God knows to be important are very often not the same thing. Amen.

Isaiah 49:1-7

49 Listen to me, you islands;
hear this, you distant nations:
Before I was born the Lord called me;
from my mother's womb he has spoken my name.
2 He made my mouth like a sharpened sword,
in the shadow of his hand he hid me;
he made me into a polished arrow
and concealed me in his quiver.
3 He said to me, "You are my servant,
Israel, in whom I will display my splendor."
4 But I said, "I have labored in vain;
I have spent my strength for nothing at all.

Yet what is due me is in the Lord's hand,
and my reward is with my God."

⁵ And now the Lord says—

he who formed me in the womb to be his servant
to bring Jacob back to him
and gather Israel to himself,
for I am honored in the eyes of the Lord
and my God has been my strength—

⁶ he says:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant
to restore the tribes of Jacob
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."

⁷ This is what the Lord says—

the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel—
to him who was despised and abhorred by the nation,
to the servant of rulers:

"Kings will see you and stand up,
princes will see and bow down,
because of the Lord, who is faithful,
the Holy One of Israel, who has chosen you."

John 1:29-42

²⁹ The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! ³⁰ This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' ³¹ I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

³² Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. ³³ And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' ³⁴ I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

³⁵ The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. ³⁶ When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

³⁷ When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. ³⁸ Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?"

They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

³⁹ "Come," he replied, "and you will see."

So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

⁴⁰ Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. ⁴¹ The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). ⁴² And he brought him to Jesus.

Jesus looked at him and said, “You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas” (which, when translated, is Peter).